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ABSTRACT

Intended as an orientation for music librarians unfamiliar with the film music field, this presentation addresses the most common film music questions received from library patrons, including queries about composers, soundtrack albums, the subject of the music, and scores, and describes the basic film music reference sources to consult for answers. Discussions include the advantages and disadvantages of specific filmographies, discographies, and guides to primary and secondary materials, as well as organizations to consult for additional assistance. A bibliography of 15 filmographies, discographies, secondary bibliographies, guides to primary sources, soundtrack record dealers, and film music organizations is also provided. (KM)

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LIBRARY RESOURCES IN SPECIAL AREAS OF MUSIC: FILM MUSIC

by

H. Stephen Wright

A paper presented at the 56th annual meeting
of the Music Library Association
Eugene, Oregon, February 12, 1987

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Abstract

This is a transcript of a presentation given at the 56th annual meeting of the Music Library Association, February 12, 1987, in Eugene, Oregon; it was intended as an orientation for music librarians unfamiliar with the film music field. The presentation addresses the most common film music questions received from library patrons and describes the basic film music reference sources (filmographies, discographies, and guides to primary and secondary materials). Organizations which can provide additional assistance are also discussed. A handout distributed at the meeting, giving full information for each of the sources discussed, is appended.

For many years now, I've been interested in film music. However, I'm not going to try to persuade you that film music is important (though I might slip in a little plug at the end). What I'll try to give you is an explanation of how to deal with patrons who ask troublesome questions about film music: who wrote the music for what movie, how can I get the soundtrack album for a certain movie, how do I get the sheet music, how do I find out more. And they do ask--in every library, large and small, they ask.

Let's address the simplest question first: who wrote what.

Items 1 and 2 on my bibliography are James Limbacher's Film Music: From Violins to Video and its supplement, Keeping Score: Film Music 1972-1979. A medium-to-large library is quite likely to have these, and you may be aware of them. However, they have problems you may not be aware of.

First and most serious: Film Music: From Violins to Video is notorious (or should be notorious) for its countless errors and omissions; when it first appeared, it was savaged by critics as sloppy and unreliable. Though the supplement was prepared ostensibly to extend coverage up to 1979, many of its entries are, in fact, corrections of entries in the original volume. So, both volumes must be checked in most cases.

Second, the books are very awkwardly organized; if you don't know the release date of a film, you must first consult a section titled "Film Titles and Dates," which gives release dates, but not composers' names; then you must refer to the section "Films and Their Composers," which is organized by date, to learn the composer's name! Limbacher also includes discographies in both volumes, but I'll talk more about those later.

There's also a problem which is no fault of Limbacher's. Keeping Score is clearly identified in its preface as the supplement to Violins to Video; however, the Library of Congress gave the two volumes very different classification numbers. If you have these books, you probably don't have them together on the shelf--a real problem, since both volumes must usually be consulted.

What can you do if you don't want to struggle with these books--or you don't have them? Well, there is a wonderful book by Clifford McCarty, Film Composers in America (number 3 on the bibliography), which is quite accurate and more pleasingly organized than Limbacher, but it only covers films up to 1953. If you know that the film you're seeking is an "oldie," check McCarty first.

If you work in a library where music and non-music materials are housed under the same roof, then you can profitably consult film reference sources such as Halliwell's Film Guide. However, film sources will generally not provide a complete list of a film composer's output, which Limbacher and McCarty do.

David Meeker's Jazz in the Movies (number 4 on the bibliography) is confined to films containing jazz scores. The wonderful feature of this work is that it often gives not only the composer's name, but the names of individual jazz instrumentalists who performed on a film soundtrack.

Proceeding from this to stickier matters . . . once you have provided the name of the composer for a particular film, the patron may be satisfied--if you're lucky. Usually, however, this information segues into a request for that most ephemeral object,

the "soundtrack album."

Your patron has asked for the soundtrack album to film "X," and it isn't listed in your catalog--what then? Assuming that the patron doesn't simply shrug and head for the door, you may wish to determine before going any further whether the desired soundtrack album ever actually existed; many patrons assume that every film ever made has a soundtrack album. There are a number of retrospective film music discographies available, most of them highly selective; my favorite is Steven Smolian's (number 7 on the bibliography), out-of-date though it is. Items 5 and 6 are price guides for collectors; they are far from scholarly, but they can serve in a pinch. Limbacher's two books, as I mentioned earlier, include extensive discographies, but they lack detail and are no more free of error than the remainder of his work.

There is, of course, the Schwann catalog. Unfortunately, many soundtracks never seem to make it into Schwann--particularly "pirate" or "bootleg" albums, which are so important in film music discography. Additionally, soundtrack albums go out of print with alarming swiftness, yet they persist in Schwann like ghostly afterimages--sometimes for a year or more.

OCLC or other bibliographic networks can also be valuable discographic sources, especially in those peculiar cases involving the use in films of pre-existing music from the classical repertoire. If a film employing "classical" music is a popular success, patron requests for the music are certain to result--though in a disguised form. Recently, for example, a patron came to me asking for the soundtrack of The Elephant Man; what he really wanted was Samuel Barber's Adagio for Strings. How can

you recognize such a request? Well, it helps to be a movie buff; if not, a search of OCLC (or some other bibliographic network) using the film title may yield up this information.

Verifying the existence of a soundtrack album is one thing; having it in your hands is another. Your patron may have already gone through the frustrating experience of trying to "special order" a soundtrack album from a "chain" record store in the neighborhood shopping mall. Of course, you can always try inter-library loan at this point, but predictably, this usually fails (though sometimes you get lucky and find a public library that will send the record). There are academic libraries that collect soundtrack albums heavily, but your patron may balk at traveling great distances to listen to a record that could conceivably be purchased. Generally the only feasible solution is to enter the fearsome world of the "soundtrack collector's market."

If you are fortunate enough to be located near a major city, the largest record stores in such areas often maintain extensive stocks of soundtracks, including the elusive imported and pirated items. There may even be rare record dealers nearby with sizeable stocks of out-of-print soundtracks. But if nothing is available near you, you can easily deal, through the mail, with one of the shops listed under Roman numeral V on the handout--shops that specialize in film music recordings. Among this group, you should be able to find whatever is wanted, outside of the most extreme rarities. Out-of-print soundtracks generally range in price from a few dollars to about fifty dollars, though one does occasionally see higher prices--for example, the soundtrack to a forgotten industrial documentary, Rhapsody of Steel, currently goes for

about 75 to 100 dollars.

Locating materials about the subject of film music is something demanded less often by patrons, but it presents challenges because it crosses the disciplinary lines between film and music. Had I given this talk a few short years ago, I could have easily filled many minutes describing the need to search film literature indexes and other non-music sources. Now, however, you need only consult item 8 of the bibliography, Steven D. Wescott's A Comprehensive Bibliography of Music for Film and Television. This massive work provides access to virtually everything ever published about film music. Though there are some minor omissions, Wescott's book is now the ideal starting point for any film music research.

Now we come to the most difficult aspect of film music research: access to primary materials, the scores themselves. How do you get a copy of the actual score to a film? Unfortunately, you can't--most of the time. Unlike soundtrack albums, which are generally available even when rare, scores of film music are often completely unavailable. Although they may be described in film credits as "published" or "copyrighted," film scores are not offered for sale to the public and are often not even deposited for copyright purposes. There are published manifestations on occasion--mostly school band arrangements or simplified piano adaptations, and these may satisfy some patron demands--but for serious research, one must turn to the primary materials: manuscripts and copies prepared for use in the film studios.

If you attended the Conference on Music Bibliography last fall, you may have heard a delightful presentation by Gillian

Anderson in which she illustrated the circuitous and sometimes frustrating process of locating film scores. These materials occupy various locations both likely and unlikely; major collections are located (predictably) in Southern California, in Washington, D.C. (at the Library of Congress and the Copyright Office), and (less predictably) at the University of Wyoming. Single-composer collections and other small caches of scores are scattered throughout the United States; there's even one here in Eugene, Oregon.

There is no "Film Music RISM" as yet, although the Society for the Preservation of Film Music, a relatively new organization to which I and a few other music librarians belong, hopes to produce one eventually. In the meantime, there are two sources that serve: Resources of American Music History (number 9 on the bibliography), which, though emphasizing pre-1941 materials, does cite a number of collections of film music extending well beyond that date; and Linda Harris Mehr's Motion Pictures, Television and Radio: A Union Catalog (number 10 on the bibliography), which you may not be aware of since it is not primarily a music reference source. The latter work is particularly useful in locating music scores hidden in special collections of film material.

These two sources do not list the individual titles of film scores held, only the composer's name and a brief description of the extent of the collection; thus, correspondence with the library is necessary in order to determine exactly what the collection contains. Although these film score collections are generally not fully cataloged, brief typewritten inventories are usually available. Because these collections are often acquired from the

composers themselves or their estates, one would expect that they always contain autograph manuscripts. Not so; frequently one finds only the cryptically-notated condensed conductor's score, in the hand of a studio copyist.

If a public or academic library housing a composer's materials cannot be found, one must turn to less promising options. The Copyright Office is a possibility, if the score has been copyrighted separately from the film--sometimes that isn't the case. There are also the music libraries of the major film studios--Paramount, MGM, and so on--but these collections are not open to the public. Gaining access generally requires a personal contact within the film industry. The Society for the Preservation of Film Music may be able to assist you in obtaining access to studio materials, but no promises are made. Even if one is lucky enough to get in, disappointment may await; these studio libraries vary in their attitudes toward preservation. One studio may carefully preserve a full score and set of orchestral parts, while another may retain only the conductor's score--or nothing at all. Finally, one can seek out the composers themselves; if they are not too busy, they may be able to help. The Society for the Preservation of Film Music can forward letters to composers. These are just a few of the problems involved in locating scores of film music; I have treated the subject at much greater length in an article, "The Materials of Film Music: Their Nature and Accessibility," which will appear in Film Music Studies, a forthcoming publication of the Society for the Preservation of Film Music.

For me, film music is the most exciting thing happening in the contemporary music field; it is music in a serious idiom, but

it speaks directly and powerfully to an immense audience encompassing all levels of our society. Yet there is still much we do not know about this art; the synthesis of sound and image is still mysterious and little-understood. Serious film music scholarship is still relatively young, and interest in the field is yet confined to a small group of enthusiasts, but I believe that it is inevitable that this interest will continue to expand. The legendary film composer Bernard Herrmann was fond of saying that future generations would be more interested in film than in any other aspect of twentieth-century art, because film is the only new art form created in this century. And Manfred F. Bukofzer, writing in MLA Notes in 1948, speculated that in the future, film music "may be regarded as the characteristic music of the twentieth century." As music librarians, our responsibility is to recognize the blossoming of that interest and respond intelligently and sympathetically to our patrons' film music needs; I hope that today I have enhanced your ability to do so.

LIBRARY RESOURCES IN SPECIAL AREAS OF MUSIC: Film Music H. Stephen Wright
Music Library Association - February 12, 1987

I. Filmographies

1. Limbacher, James L. Film Music: From Violins to Video. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1974.

2. ----------. Keeping Score: Film Music 1972-1979. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1981.

3. McCarty, Clifford. Film Composers in America: A Checklist of Their Work. 1953; rpt. New York: Da Capo, 1972.

4. Meeker, David. Jazz in the Movies. [2nd ed.] New York: Da Capo, 1982.

II. Discographies

5. Osborne, Jerry. Movie/TV Soundtracks & Original Cast Albums Price Guide. Phoenix, Ariz.: O'Sullivan Woodside, 1981.

6. Reed, James W. 1984 Price Guide for Sound Track Records. Quarryville, Pa.: Sound Track Album Retailers, 1984. [A new, updated edition will be available in late 1987 or early 1988.]

7. Smolian, Steven. A Handbook of Film, Theater, and Television Music on Record, 1948-1969. New York: Record Undertaker, 1970.

See also #1 and #2 above.

III. Secondary Bibliography

8. Wescott, Steven D. A Comprehensive Bibliography of Music for Film and Television. Detroit Studies in Music Bibliography, No. 54. Detroit: Information Coordinators, 1985.

IV. Guides to Primary Sources

9. Krummel, D. W., et al. Resources of American Music History: A Directory of Source Materials from Colonial Times to World War II. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981.

10. Mehr, Linda Harris, ed. Motion Pictures, Television, and Radio: A Union Catalogue of Manuscript and Special Collections in the Western United States. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1977.

V. Soundtrack Record Dealers

Broadway/Hollywood Recordings, P.O. Box 496, Georgetown, Connecticut 06829, Phone 203-544-8288 (Catalog: $1.00)

Jemm's Soundtracks, P.O. Box 157, Glenview, Illinois 60025 (Catalog: $1.00)

RTS, P.O. Box 1829, Novato, California 94948, Phone 415-883-2179 (Catalog ["Prospectus"]: $1.00)

Sound Track Album Retailers, P.O. Box 487, New Holland, Pennsylvania 17557, Phone 717-656-0121 (Catalog: Free)

VI. Organization

Society for the Preservation of Film Music, 10850 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 770, Los Angeles, California 90024, Phone 213-474-5225